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# Teacher Preparation

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Nicholas Lacasse  
Kelci O'Neill  
Laura Farr

# Table of Contents

## **1 Intro**

## **2 Resources**

Textbooks

Facilities

Co-Workers

## **3 Organization**

Homework Collection

Gradebooks

Graded Papers and Other Handouts

## **4 Time Management**

## **5 Dealing with Students Who...**

... Finish Early

... Need Extra Attention

## **6 Class Discussions**

Guiding Questions

Goals for What to Get Out of Discussion

## **7 Conclusion**

# Intro

In the realm of education, what is seen in the classroom is a small fraction of the work a teacher must complete. People seldom consider the similarities between teaching and giving a presentation. Think back to a time when you had to create a presentation for a class; how long did it take you to complete it? A teacher's job is to not only prepare a presentation for every day (often multiple presentations) but to tailor that presentation to a hundred different audience members. In order to accomplish this a teacher must be prepared.

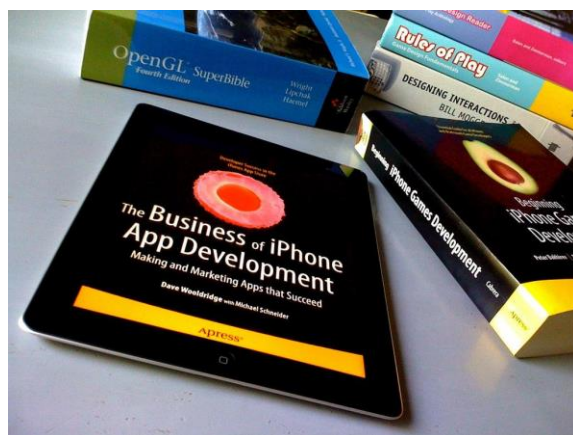
Teacher preparation is the keystone of education. Preparation is what allows a teacher to have the resources necessary to teach their class, be ready to guide critical class discussions, having backup plans and tend to everyday activities such as grading papers and preparing for the next day.

## Resources

### Textbooks

One of the most common resources teachers use are textbooks. Often, students are asked to read passages of textbooks for supplemental understanding or use the text for reference during coursework. As a teacher you will need to be familiar with the [textbook your district uses](#) -- or, if you're fortunate enough, you will need to determine which textbook you will be using with your class. For the former, schools have different protocol for distributing these texts. While some schools might just take students names and the textbook number, others require that students fill out special forms that include contact information in case the book is lost or damaged (Williams, 86-87).

But what if you get to select your own textbook? How do you make that kind of decision. According to faculty at Brigham Young University, the methods teachers use to select textbooks are very diverse. However, some of the questions teachers might ask themselves include: does the content of the book match the learning objectives, do the problems in the chapters provide good learning experiences for the students, is the book engaging to students, and, in some cases, is the price of the book reasonable (How do Professors)? A more unique option is available for ambitious teachers who feel there is no book on the market to serve their needs.



Some educators choose to write their own textbooks. David Rockwood of Utah is one of those unique educators. Rockwood teaches at the secondary level and decided to create a sports psychology class for his school. When he began searching for textbooks appropriate for his class he soon encountered a dilemma: there were no appropriate textbooks. Choosing to create his own textbook, he enjoyed many benefits. When writing your own textbook you can tailor the book to whatever needs your class has. Furthermore, you can adapt the book if you ever realize there is something you do not care for. Something to consider, however, is that students will only ever have one perspective (unless you work other sources into your lesson plans) -- you and the book you wrote. (Koebler)

Regardless of how you obtain the text you will be using for your class there, an important aspect to consider when choosing (or writing) it is the level of difficulty. Research shows us that it is important for the textbook students use to be on their reading level. Jeanne Chall and Sue Conard, professors at Harvard University, tell us in their book, *Should Textbooks Challenge Students?*, "...for most grades and subjects, the better the readers (on standardized tests), the better they understood their books..." This idea that student should have material proximal to their learning level is not new (Chall, 91). Lev Vygotsky suggested that students learn best in their zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the zone in which the material students are learning is not too hard and also not too difficult. It is the gap between what they can do on their own and what they can do with a little assistance (Papalia, 34).

## **Facilities**

The educator should also familiarize themselves with the resources of the facility. While perhaps easy to overlook, the physical resources of the school will be integral to the success of your students. Dr. Jeffery Lackney informs us that "The school facility is much more than a passive container of the educational process: it is, rather, an integral component of the conditions of learning." While Lackney speaks more of the architectural design of the school, it reminds us how critical the physical surroundings are. The educator calls on many tools; not all of which are at his or her disposal in their designated classroom. Many classes find themselves in the library. Some schools might handle equipment such as projectors, or manage the bookings of rooms with smartboards. There could be many resources present in your school that must be booked ahead of time. Keep this in mind when preparing for lessons by making sure the appropriate facilities or equipment are reserved. By becoming familiar with the resources your school provides you can make your lessons more powerful.

## **Co-Workers**

One of the greatest assets you will have are your co-workers. Combined, your co-workers bring perhaps hundreds of years of experience! As a beginning teacher, you should recognize the importance of networking with your colleagues. They can provide valuable information about

how to handle certain situations, strategies for teaching, managing time, becoming familiar with resources in the school or services provided. If there is anything you need to know, the odds are that a colleague will be able to help. *Managing Secondary Classrooms* lists peers as an essential resource for new teachers.

## Organization



Organization is critical in maintaining a functional classroom. There are many different methods that teachers can use in different parts of their daily routine. From deciding how to keep track of students' grades to finding the most effective way to collect homework, organizational skills can be found in almost every aspect of a teacher's day. This section of the chapter discusses different ways teachers need to be organized and gives some suggestions on how to do so.

### Homework Collection

Every teacher has their own way of doing things. This includes the way that they collect homework before or during class time. When deciding on the best way to collect homework it is important to consider how effective it will be. It is important to create a routine that is easy for students to understand and get used to, does not take away from class time, and also is organized and easy to maintain as a teacher.

The following are some examples of how teachers can collect homework in the classroom without taking away from class time:

- *Homework trays:* Have a tray set up in the classroom that is specifically for students to place their homework once they enter the classroom. This tray can be on the teacher's desk or at any other designated spot in the classroom.
- *Homework Folders:* Have students keep a two-pocket folder that is used just for homework. They will use the folder to bring work to and from school. Inside of each folder, label one side "Homework in Progress" and the other "Completed Homework." Once students arrive to the classroom they will place their folders on the corner of their desk so the teacher can collect them. The teacher can then add any necessary papers for that night's assignment in each folder and also is able to collect all the completed homework.
- *Corner of desks:* When students come to class, have them place their homework on the corner of their desks. As they are completing any morning work, the teacher will go around and pick up the homework.

When it comes to collecting homework, it is not a one size fits all deal. All of these ideas can be modified so they work best for each individual teacher. Of course this is not a complete list of all

the possible ways to effectively collect homework. These are just a few ideas that are commonly used in today's classroom.

## Gradebooks

Keeping track of student's grades is important not only for teachers to be able to track student learning but it is also very important so teachers can give timely feedback to the students. There are multiple ways to keep a gradebook. Teachers can decide to keep track of grades online or actually have a physical gradebook. Both options are effective but are up to the individual teacher on what works best for them.

There are many options for teachers who wish to keep track of grades online. A lot of schools have software that teachers use to submit final grades and teachers can choose whether or not they want to post all of their grades to this system. There are also a number of different software options that teachers can choose to use individually if they would better meet their needs. Two different online gradebooks are [ThinkWave](#) and [LearnBoost](#).

For the teachers who like to keep a physical notebook there are also different options. Teacher can either decide to purchase one either at a store or online or make their own. There are many places online where teachers can find resources and guides to building their own gradebook and things that they might want to consider including. The great thing about creating your own gradebook is being able to personalize it to your specific needs. On the site [The Teachers Lounge](#) there is a post that is specifically about personalizing your own plan/grade book. This post is filled with a lot of great suggestions and links that will bring you to free templates that help teachers customize their own book.

## Graded Papers and Other Handouts

Teaching multiple classes in a day can get hectic for any teacher. Being able to keep everything organized will help ease some of the stress. Like everything that was previously discussed, organizing handouts and graded work that needs to be returned varies among teachers. It is important for every teacher to figure out what works best for them. Some ways to keep graded homework and handouts organized is by:

- *Keeping a large file tote.* This tote acts both as a filing cabinet and a tote bag at the same time. Teachers can carry folders for different subjects, lessons, or units. Organizing papers like this makes it easy to bring back and forth to work because of the handles on the bag.
- *Having different bags for each class.* Some teachers find it easy to have different bags for each class. They can store whatever handouts and materials they need in one place without mixing them up the materials for other classes.
- *Keeping labeled binders.* A quick and easy way to keep lesson plans, units, resources, and notes is by separating them into different binders. This is another great way to

organize work because teachers can label the spines of the binders and also can color coordinate them in a way that works for them.

Making sure that teachers have an organized filing system in order to keep track of important resources, lesson plans, and notes is very important to maintain a functional classroom. These are just some ideas to help keep a teachers life organized.

## Time Management

Time management is one of the most important skills a teacher can have. A teacher's time is very valuable, and this is because many teachers keep themselves as busy as possible, in addition to taking care of their responsibilities they have to prepare their class. Much of a teacher's day is already scheduled, so teachers have to try to stretch out the little amount of prep time that they have. Additionally, it is not uncommon to have students coming to the teacher during prep time to ask for help; that can eat into the time that the teacher needs: to be on multiple committees for the school, to be the advisor for multiple clubs, to be asked to write recommendations for college applications, and having to prepare multiple materials for the next day. As a teacher, staying organized and protective of your time should be your defence from stress.



On page 7 of [\*Time Management for Teachers\*](#), author Steve Francis writes:

Before starting out on a time management plan you need to spend a few days observing and reflecting. Watch for times when you are not using your time efficiently. The key question is always, 'Is this the best use of my time?' Watch for problem areas where improvements in systems or processes could make a positive impact. For example, do you spend a considerable amount of time explaining to students what they need to do in order to make up missed assignments? Is your time taken up by filing, emailing, phone calls, disruptions, copying material, marking the roll, repeating directions? Identify what your "time leaks" are and then find a way to plug them. You may be surprised at the activities that are soaking up your valuable time. It is also useful to monitor your own energy levels and ability to concentrate. Try to identify the times of the day when you are most effective. Do not try to accomplish difficult tasks when you are tired. Save those for your peak periods.

In other words, it is important to find what things are draining your time, and figure out how to eliminate those tasks. Also, teachers need to self assess their energy level throughout the day, and tackle larger tasks when they feel fresh and clear-headed.

## Dealing with Students who...

### ...Finish Early

There often will be students who finish their work quicker than other students. Students who finish things early run the risk of becoming restless and disrupting other students. It is important to find an activity for the student who is done to focus their attention on, so that they will not have the opportunity to be disruptive. The first thing you can have the student do is to double check that their work is done neatly and that all parts are complete and show a high level of understanding. Sometimes, students prefer the activities that are allowed after they finish their work so they will rush through the work that they have, making it messy and with a low level of comprehension and completion. We are trying to get students to achieve mastery, and they cannot do so if they are always rushing through their work.

[Scholastic.com](http://Scholastic.com) asked teachers what they do with students that finish their work early. Mrs. Katy Hoh, from Walls Elementary School in Pitman, NJ suggested: "During the first week of school I ask the class to come up with reasonable ideas to do when they finish a worksheet, test etc. before their classmates. I set some rules first:

1. It has to be a quiet activity.
2. It cannot involve spending money to do it!
3. You have to be able to do it alone.
4. It has to be in good taste.
5. Teacher has the final approval.

As a class we discuss the options together and make a class list of ideas that is posted. Some of the ideas that students have come up with include:

- Have a book in your desk that you pick out ahead of time.
- Work on a Sudoku puzzles [*sic*].
- Make a card for a family member or friend (I keep a card materials basket handy).
- Draw a picture
- Go to the back of the room and play quietly with playdough or puzzles like rubik's cubes.
- Write a letter to a student in another class, or another teacher, or staff member.
- Window Watch: go to the back of the classroom where you won't disturb anyone and look outside, make a list of things that you see, one point for everything that you write down and two points for something that moves (good for naturalist learners).
- If anyone is not respectful of their classmates by being loud they must come back to their desks and either put their head down or read to themselves."



Ms. Hoh asks the students at the beginning of the year what they would like to do when they finish their work. This gives students the opportunity to choose for themselves something quiet they would like to do that will keep their attention and keep them quiet. Activities like these are sometimes better than giving students additional assignments to complete because students can feel that they are being punished for being a good student and completing their work quickly. None of the other students finished the original work, and so they only are having to complete one assignment instead of the quick student that now has two. To keep it fair, unless they ask for extra assignments or independent study, let them enjoy some quiet time to themselves.

### **...Need Extra Attention**

Some students need some extra help to finish their work or complete assignments. It is the teacher's responsibility to make sure the students understand and complete their work with confidence. Obviously, it is important to wander the room during lessons, assisting students when they raise their hands, but other than that, what can the teacher do to lessen the probability that the student will get lost and fall behind?

Believe it or not, there are many things that a teacher can make a conscious effort to do to make it easier for their struggling students. Some examples of these things include: tapping into different learning styles, writing the directions on the board, keeping homework short, allowing for changes on their work, asking the students questions, setting reasonable goals for the students, giving shorter tests or switching to oral tests, providing quiet places for students to work, being flexible, giving immediate feedback, focusing on key points, setting up academic plans, getting the students tutors or extra help outside of class, listening to the students needs, and helping the students get organized.

If the student is falling behind because of behavioral reasons, different actions have to be taken. The K-12 Teachers Alliance suggests to try the following actions with students who are acting out.

Try to understand the reasons behind behaviors. There is something behind the behavior. Everything we do is motivated by something and understanding this motivation is key. Our job is to try to discover what is motivating the behavior. Are they seeking attention? Do they feel insecure? Are there issues at home? Is there a pattern for the behavior? Be creative in your discipline. Do not go straight for school policy, try to get to the heart of the problem. Give clear instructions and consequences. Make sure rules are posted where students can see them.

Understand the development level of the student. He/she may be immature for their age or perhaps in rare occasions, more mature than classmates (especially if they have repeated the grade level). Set reasonable goals. If the child is immature, he/she may not realize their behavior is not appropriate for their age. Habits have

to be changed and can be accomplished through daily goals. Acknowledge positive behavior and changes- even small ones.

## Class Discussions

Class Discussions are a useful tool to use in the classroom to have everyone share their opinions and to get everyone to participate. However, the usefulness of the activity depends on the richness of the discussion. How do you make a discussion rich? You have to create and foster deep intellectual conversations that explore the content deeply. To do this, you need to formulate prompting questions that are about the content, and cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Professors at West Michigan University believe that the following things constitute [good discussion](#):

- “Good discussion questions are not answered by "yes" or "no." Instead they lead to *higher order thinking*(analysis, synthesis, comparison, evaluation) about the work and the issues it raises.
- Good discussion questions call for more than simply recalling facts or guessing what the teacher already wants to know, but are *open-ended*, leading to a variety of responses. Good questions recognize that readers will have different perspectives and interpretations and such questions attempt to engage readers in dialogue with each other.
- Good discussion questions depend on a *careful reading* of the text. They often cite particular scenes or passages and ask people to look at them closely and draw connections between these passages and the rest of the work.
- Good discussion questions are simply and *clearly stated*. They do not need to be repeated or reworded to be understood.
- Good discussion questions are *useful* to the students. Good questions can help to clarify passages or issues students may find difficult. They help students understand cultural differences that influence their reading. They invite personal responses and connections.
- Good discussion questions *make (and challenge) connections* between the text at issue and other works, and the themes and issues of the course.”

Discussions are great for both interpersonal and intrapersonal learners. Interpersonal learners get to talk with their peers about their ideas, while intrapersonal learners are not called upon and they get to have time to themselves to think before they provide any input to the discussion. Discussions are also a useful way to check for students depth of understanding, if students give shallow answers, that may mean they do not understand the material or that they were not prepared for the discussion.

# Conclusion

From time management, to having and using resources effectively, to always having everything organized, a teacher's job is never finished. Being prepared in all aspects of teaching is important in maintaining a positive and effective learning environment. Teaching and making sure students are learning and understanding the content is a teacher's number one priority. Preparation is not only necessary but critical in ensuring that teachers are doing their jobs the best they can.

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